Lustrous

Book: 88

Nevaeh

Marcel Ray Duriez

27 Fallen Phantoms

I drifted, I dreamed. Where I floated, beneath the dark waters, I heard the happiest sound my mind could conjure up - as beautiful, as uplifting as it was ghastly. It was another growl; A deeper, wilder roar, ringing in anger. I was almost brought back to the surface by a sharp pain that slashed my raised hand, but I could not find my way back far enough to open my eyes.

-And-

Then I knew I was dead. For through the heavy waters, I heard an

angel calling my name and calling me to the only heaven I wanted. 'Oh no, Lily, no!' the angel's voice cried out in terror.

Behind that longed-for sound was another sound - a terrible commotion that my mind shied away from. A vicious bass growl, a shocking snap, and a high-pitched sharpening sound that suddenly cuts out... I tried to focus on the angel's voice instead.' Lily please! Lily listens to me please Lily please!' He pleaded. Yes, that is what I wanted to say. anything.

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But I could not find my lips.' Melchor!' the angel cried, agony in his perfect voice. 'Lily, Lily, no, oh please, no, no!' And the angel sobbed tearlessly, broken sobs. The angel should not cry, it was wrong. I tried to find him, to tell him everything was fine, but the water was so deep it was pressing down on me, and I could not breathe. There was a pressure point against my head. It hurts. Then, as that pain broke through the darkness for me, other pains came, greater pains. I screamed, gasped, and burst through the dark pool.

'Lily!' the angel cried. 'She's lost some blood, but the head wound

isn't deep,' a calm voice informed me. 'Watch her leg, it's broken.' A howl of anger choked on the angel's lips. I felt a sharp pang in my side. This could not be heaven, could it? There was too much pain for that. 'Some ribs too, I think,' the methodical voice continued. But the sharp pain faded. There was a new pain, a searing pain in my hand that overshadowed everything else. Someone burned me.' Eduard.' I tried to tell him, but my voice was so heavy and slow. I could not understand myself.' Lily, you will be fine. Can you hear me, Lily? I love you.' 'Melvin,' I tried again.

My voice was a little clearer. 'Yes, I'm here.' 'It hurts,' I whimpered. 'I know, Lily, I know,' - and then, away from me, worried - 'can't you do anything?' My bag, please... Hold your breath Naddalin Natalie, it will help,' Melchor promised. Naddalin Natalie?' I groaned.' She is here, she knew where to find you.'

'My hand hurts,' I tried to tell him.' I know Melchor will give you something, it will stop.' 'My hand is on fire!' I screamed and finally broke through the last of the darkness, my eyes flared open.

I could not see his face, something dark and warm clouded my eyes. Why couldn't they see the fire and put it out? His voice was startled. 'Lily?' 'The fire! Someone stops the fire!' I screamed as it burned me.' Melchor! Your hand!' 'He bit her.' Melchor's voice was not calm anymore, she was horrified. I heard Melvin catch his breath in horror.' Melvin, you must do it.' It was Naddalin Natalie's voice, close to my head. Cool fingers stroking the wetness in my eyes.' No!' he yelled.' Naddalin Natalie' I moaned.'

There might be a chance,' Melchor said. What?' Melvin begged.

'See if you can suck the venom out. The wound is clean.' As Melchor spoke, I could feel more pressure on my head, something poking and tugging at my scalp. The pain of it was lost in the pain of the fire.' Will this work?' Naddalin Natalie's voice was strained. 'I don't know,' Melchor said. 'But we must hurry.' Melchor, I...' Melvin hesitated. 'I don't know if I can do that.' There was a pain in his beautiful voice again.'

It is your choice, Melvin, one way or another. I cannot help you. I need to stop this bleeding here if you draw blood from her hand.' I writhed in the grip of fiery torture, the movement

making the pain in my leg flare up sickeningly.' Eduard!' I screamed. I realized my eyes were closed again. I opened them, desperate to find his face. And I found him. Finally, I could see his perfect face staring at me, twisted into a mask of indecision and pain.' Naddalin Natalie, get me something to support her leg!' Melchor leaned over me and worked on my head.

'Melvin, you must do it now or it will be too late.' Melvin's face was lined. I watched his eyes when doubt was suddenly replaced by a blazing determination. His jaw clenched. I felt his cool, strong fingers on my burning

hand, holding it in place. Then his head bent over it and his cold lips pressed against my skin. At first, the pain was worse. I screamed and slapped the cool hands holding me back. I heard Naddalin Natalie's voice trying to calm me. Something heavy was holding my leg to the ground and Melchor had my head Clamped in the vise of his stone arms.

Then, slowly, my writhing quieted as my hand grew numb. The fire dulled and concentrated on a smaller and smaller point. I felt like I faded into consciousness as the pain subsided. I was afraid of falling back into the black water for fear of losing

him in the dark. 'Melvin,' I tried to say but could not hear my voice. You could hear me.' He is right here, Lily.' Stay, Melvin, stay with me...'I will.' His voice was strained but somehow triumphant. I sighed contentedly. The fire was gone, the other pains blunted by sleepiness seeping through my body.' Is everything out?'

Melchor asked from somewhere far away.' Your blood tastes clean,' Melvin said softly. 'I can taste morphine.' Lily?' Melchor called me. I tried to answer. 'Mm?' 'Is the fire gone?' 'Yeah,' I sighed. 'Thank you, Melvin.' 'I love you,' he replied. 'I know,' I breathed, so tired. I heard my

favorite sound in the world: Melvin's chuckle, weak with relief. 'Lily?' Melchor asked again. I frowned; I wanted to sleep. 'What?' 'Where's your mom?' 'In California,' I sighed. 'He tricked me, Melvin. He watched our videos.' The outrage in my voice was pitifully weak.

Whereas that reminded me.' Naddalin Natalie.' I tried to open my eyes. 'Naddalin Natalie, the video - he knew you, Naddalin Natalie, he knew where you came from.' I wanted to speak urgently, but my voice was weak. 'I smell gasoline,' I added, surprised by the haze in my brain. 'It's time to move them,' Melchor said. 'No,

I want to sleep,' I complained. 'You can sleep honey, I'll carry you,' Melvin reassured me. And I was in his arms, rocked against his chest - floating, all the pain was gone. 'Sleep now Lily' were the last words I heard.

28 DEAD ENDS AND ALL DEAD FRINDS

Eyes opened to a bright, white light. I was in an unknown room, a white room. The wall next to me was covered with long vertical blinds; Above my head, the bright lights dazzled me. I was leaning on a hard, uneven bed - a bed with rails. The pillows were flat and lumpy.

Somewhere nearby there was an annoying beeping noise. I hoped that meant I was still alive. Death should not be so unpleasant. My hands were all twisted with transparent tubes, and something was glued over my face, under my nose. I raised my hand to tear it off.' No, you do not.'

And cool fingers caught my hand.' Eduard?' I turned my head slightly, and his exquisite face was just a few inches from mine, his chin resting on the edge of my pillow. I realized again that I was alive, this time with gratitude and exhilaration. 'Oh, Melvin, I'm so sorry!' Shah,' he silenced me. 'Right now, everything is

fine.' What happened?' I could not remember clearly, and my mind rebelled against me when I tried to remember.' I was too late. I could have been too late,' he whispered, his voice tormented.' I was so stupid, Melvin.

I thought he had my mother.' He tricked us all.' I must call Charlie and my mother,' the haze made me realize.' Naddalin Natalie called her. Rameauite is here - well, here in the hospital. She is getting something to eat right now.' She is here?' I tried to sit up, but the turning in my head accelerated, and his hand gently pressed me onto the pillows.' She will be back soon,' he promised.

'And you have to stay still.' But what did you tell her?' I panicked. I had no interest in being reassured. My mother was here, and I was recovering from a vampire attack. 'Why did you tell her I was here?' You went down two flights of stairs and fell through a window.' He paused. 'You have to admit it could happen.' I sighed, and it hurt. I stared down at my body under the sheet, the huge lump that was my leg.' How bad am I?' I asked.'

You have a broken leg, four broken ribs, some cracks in your skull, bruises that cover every inch of your skin, and you have lost a lot of blood. They gave you a few transfusions. I

did not like it - it made you smell wrong for a while.' That must have been a subtle change for you.' No, I like the way you smell.' How did you do that?' I asked quietly. He knew immediately what I meant.' I am not sure.' He looked away from my amazed eyes, lifted my gauze-wrapped hand from the bed and gently held it in his, carefully so as not to disturb the wire that connected me to one of the monitors. I waited patiently for the rest. He sighed without returning my gaze.

'It was impossible... to stop,' he whispered. 'Impossible. But I did.' He finally looked up, with half a smile.

'I have to love you.' Don't I taste as good as I smell?' I smiled in response. That hurt my face.' Even better - better than I had imagined.' I am sorry,' I apologized. He raised his eyes to the ceiling. 'Of all the things you have to apologize for.' What should I apologize for?' For taking yourself away from me forever.' I am sorry,' I apologized again.' I know why you did it.' His voice was comforting. 'It was still irrational, of course. You should have waited for me; you should have told me.' You would not have let me go.' No,' he agreed in a grim tone, 'I wouldn't.' Some very unpleasant memories began to return to me. I

trembled and then winced. He was immediately anxious. 'Lily, what's going on?' What happened to Pierre?' After I pulled him away from you, Dejen and Jae took care of him.'

There was a strong note of regret in his voice. That confused me. 'I didn't see Dejen and Jae there.' They had to leave the room... There was a lot of blood.' But you stayed.' Yes, I stayed.' And Naddalin Natalie and Melchor...' I said in amazement.' They love you too, you know.' A flash of painful images from the last time I saw Naddalin Natalie reminded me of something. 'Did Naddalin Natalie see the tape?' I asked anxiously.' Yes.' A

new sound darkened his voice, a tone of sheer hatred.' She was always in the dark, so she did not remember it.' I know. She understands now.' His voice was flat, but his face was black with anger. I tried to reach his face with my free hand, but something stopped me. I looked down to see the IV pulling on my hand.' Isgitt.' I winced.' What is it?' he asked anxiously - distracted, but not enough. The desolation did not leave his eyes completely.'

Needles,' I explained, looking away from the one in my hand. I focused on a warped ceiling tile and tried to take a deep breath

despite the pain in my ribs.' Fear of a needle,' he murmured under his breath and shook his head. 'Oh, a sadistic vampire who wants to torture her to death, sure, no problem, she runs away to meet him. An IV, on the other hand...'I rolled my eyes. I was pleased to discover that at least this reaction was painless. I decided to change the subject.' Why are you here?' I asked. He stared at me, confused at first and then hurt when he touched his eyes. His brows contracted as he frowned. 'Do you want me to leave?' No!' I protested, horrified by the thought. 'No,' I said, "Why does my mother think you're

here?" I need to clarify my story before it comes back.' Oh,' he said, and his forehead smoothed back to marble. 'I came to Phoenix to make sense of it, to convince you to return to McAuley.'

His big eyes were so serious and sincere that I almost believed him myself. 'You agreed to see me, and you drove to the hotel where I stayed with Melchor and Naddalin Natalie - of course I was here with parental supervision,' he added virtuously, 'but you stumbled on the stairs on the way to my room and... Well, you know the rest. However, you do not have to remember any details. They have a

good excuse to be a little confused about the intricacies.' I thought about it for a moment.' There are a few flaws in this story. As if there were no broken windows.'

Not really,' he said. 'Naddalin Natalie had a bit too much fun fabricating evidence. It was all done very convincingly - you could sue the hotel if you wanted. You do not have to worry,' he promised, caressing my cheek with the lightest touches. 'Your only task now is to heal.' I was not so lost in the pain or fog of the medication that I did not respond to his touch. The beeping of the monitor jumped around unpredictably - now he

was not the only one who could hear my heart behaving badly.' It is going to be embarrassing,' I murmured to myself. He giggled, and a speculative look caught his eye.

'Hmm, I wonder...'He leaned in slowly; The beeping sound accelerated wildly before his lips even touched me. But when they did, albeit with the gentlest pressure, the beeping stopped altogether. He withdrew abruptly, his anxious expression turned into relief when the monitor reported the restart of my heart.' I need to be even more careful with you than usual.' He frowned.' I was not done kissing you yet,' I

complained. 'Don't let me get there.' He grinned and bent over to press his lips slightly against mine. The monitor was raging. But then his lips were tight. He withdrew.' I heard your mother,' he said, grinning again. Do not leave me,' I shouted, an irrational wave of panic flooded me.

I could not let him go - he could disappear from me again. He read the horror in my eyes for a brief second. 'I'm not going to do it,' he solemnly promised, and then he smiled. 'I'm taking a nap.' He moved from the rigid plastic chair at my side to the turquoise faux leather armchair at the foot of my bed, leaned it all the

way back and closed his eyes. He was completely silent.' Do not forget to breathe,' I whispered sarcastically. He took a deep breath, his eyes still closed. I could now hear my mother. She was talking to someone, a nurse, and she sounded tired and upset. I wanted to jump out of bed and run to her to calm her down, to promise that everything was fine. But I was not jumping in any form, so I waited impatiently. The door opened a crack, and it peered through.' Mom!' I whispered, my voice full of love and relief. She picked up Melvin's stand on the deck chair and walked to my bed on tiptoe.' He never leaves, does he?'

She murmured.' Mom, I am so glad to see you!' She bent down to gently embrace me, and warm tears fell on my cheeks.' Lily, I was so upset!' I am sorry, Mom. But now everything is fine, it is okay,' I comforted her.' I am only glad that your eyes are finally opened.' She was sitting on the edge of my bed. I suddenly realized that I had no idea when it was. 'How long have they been closed?' It is Friday, honorable, you have been out for a while.' Friday?' I was shocked. I tried to remember what day it had been, when... but I did not want to think about that.' They had to sedate you

for a while, honey - you have a lot of injuries.' I know.' I could feel them.' You are lucky that Dr. Shezor was there. He is such a nice man... Incredibly young, however. And he looks more like a model than a doctor...'

'You met Melchor?' And Melvin's sister Naddalin Natalie. She is a lovely girl.' She is,' I agreed with all my heart. She looked over her shoulder at Melvin, who was lying on the chair with his eyes closed. 'You didn't tell me you have such good friends in McAuley.' I winced and then moaned.' What hurts?' she asked anxiously and turned to me. Melvin's

eyes flashed on my face.' It is fine,' I assured them. 'I just have to remember not to move.' He fell back into his false sleep. I used my mother's momentary distraction to prevent the subject from returning to my less than open behavior. 'Where is Phil?' I asked quickly.' California - oh, Lily! You will never guess! Just as we were about to leave, the best news!' Deann was signed?' I guessed.' Yes! How did you guess it? The suns, can you believe it?' That is great, Mom,' I said as enthusiastically as I could do it, even though I had little idea what that meant.' And you are going to like Los

Altos Hills so much,' she enthused as I stared at her emptiness.

'I was a bit worried when Deann started talking about Akron, what about the snow and everything, because you know how I hate the cold, but now Los Altos Hills! It is always sunny, and the humidity really is not that bad. We found the cutest house, yellow, with white rims and a porch like in an old movie, and this huge oak, and it is just a few minutes from the sea, and you will have your own bathroom - 'Wait, mom!' I interrupted. Melvin still had his eyes closed, but he looked too tense to pass as sleep.

'What are you talking about? I am not going to California. I live in McAuley.'

'But you don't have to, silly anymore,' she laughed. 'Deann will now be able to be there so much more... We have talked a lot about it, and what I am going to do is swap the away games, half the time with you, half the time with him.' Mom.' I hesitated and wondered how best to proceed diplomatically. 'I want to live in McAuley. I have already settled in at school and have a few girlfriends' - she looked at Melvin again when I reminded her of friends, so I tried a different direction - 'and Charlie needs me. He is just all alone up there, and

he cannot cook at all.' You want to stay in McAuley?' she asked, confused. The idea was unimaginable for them. And then her eyes flickered back to Melvin.

'Why?'

'I told you - school, Charlie - ouch!' I shrugged my shoulders. Not a clever idea. Her hands fluttered helplessly over me, trying to find a safe place to knock. She was content with my forehead; it was unbandaged.' "Lily, honey, you hate McAuley,' she reminded me.' It is not so bad.' She frowned and looked back and forth between Melvin and me, this time

deliberately.' Is it this boy?' she whispered. I opened my mouth to lie, but her eyes examined my face, and I knew she would see through it.' He is a part of it,' I admitted. There is no need to admit how large a part is. 'So, did you have the opportunity to talk to Melvin?' I asked.' Yes.'

She hesitated and looked at his completely calm form. 'And I want to talk to you about it.' Uh-oh. 'What about that?' I asked.' This boy is in love with you,' she lamented, keeping her voice low. I think so too,' I confided. And what do you think about him?' She barely hid the angry curiosity in her voice. I sighed and

looked away. As much as I loved my mother, this was not a conversation I wanted to have with her. 'I'm pretty crazy about him.' There - that sounded like something a teenager could say with her first boyfriend.' Well, he seems genuinely nice, and, my goodness, he looks incredibly good, but you are so young, Lily...'

Her voice was uncertain; As far as I could remember, this was the first time since I was eight years old that she almost tried to sound like a parental authority. I recognized the reasonable but firm tone from conversations I had with her about men.' I know that, Mom. Do not worry.

It is just a swarm,' I reassured her.' That is right,' she agreed with slight satisfaction. Then she sighed and looked guiltily over her shoulder at the big, round clock on the wall.' Do you have to go?' She bit her lip. 'Deans should call for a while... I did not know you were going to wake up...'No problem, Mom.' I tried to tone down the relief so that she did not hurt her feelings. 'I will not be alone.' I will be back soon. I slept here, you know,' she proudly proclaimed. Oh, mom, you do not have to do that! You can sleep at home - I will never notice.' The vortex of painkillers in my brain made it difficult for me to concentrate even

now, even though I had slept for days.' I was too nervous,' she admitted embarrassed.

'There have been some crimes in the neighborhood, and I don't like being there alone.' Crime?' I asked alarmed.' Someone broke into the dance studio around the corner from the house and burned it down - there is nothing left at all! And they left a stolen car right in front of them. Do you remember when you danced there, honey?' I remember.' I trembled and winced.' I can stay, baby, if you need me.' No, Mom, I am going to be fine. Melvin will be with me.' She looked like that might be the reason

she wanted to stay. 'I'll be back tonight.' It sounded just like a warning, as it sounded like a promise, and she looked at Melvin again when she said it.' I love you, Mom.' I love you too, Lily. Try to be more careful when you leave, honey, I do not want to lose you.' Melvin's eyes remained closed, but a broad grin flashed across his face. A nurse then came in, busy checking all my tubes and wires. My mother kissed my forehead, patted my hand wrapped in gauze and left. The nurse checked the paper display on my heart monitor.' Do you feel anxious, honey? Your heart rate has

become a bit high there.' I am fine,' I assured her.

I will tell your RN that you are awake. She will be there in a minute to see you.' As soon as she closed the door, Melvin was by my side.' You stole a car?' I raised my eyebrows. He smiled, without remorse. 'It was a good car, very fast.' How was your nap?' I asked.' Interesting.' His eyes narrowed.' What?' He looked down as he answered. 'I am surprised. I thought California ... and your mother... well, I thought, that is what you want.' 'But you would be stuck in California all day. You could only come out at night,

just like a real vampire.' He almost smiled, but not quite. And then his face was serious. 'I would stay in McAuley, Lily. Or somewhere like that,' he explained. 'Somewhere where I couldn't hurt you anymore.' It did not settle in at first. I continued to stare at him empty as the words snapped into my head one by one like a horrible puzzle. I was barely aware of the sound of my accelerating heart, although when my breathing became hyperventilation, I was aware of the sharp pain in my protesting ribs. He said nothing; He watched my face suspiciously as the pain, which had nothing to do with broken bones, pain

infinitely worse, threatened to crush me. And then another nurse came into the room purposefully.

Melvin sat still as stone as she recorded my expression with a trained eye before turning to the monitors.' Time for more painkillers, honey?' she asked kindly and tapped on the IV food.' No, no,' I murmured, trying to keep the agony out of my voice. 'I don't need anything.' I could not afford to close my eyes now.' No need to be brave, honey. It is better if you are not too stressed; you must rest.' She waited, but I just shook my head.' Okay,' she sighed. 'Press the call button when you're ready.' She

gave Melvin a stern look and took an anxious look at the machinery before she left. His cool hands were on my face; I stared at him with wild eyes.' Shah, Lily, calm down.' Do not leave me,' I pleaded in a broken voice.' I will not do it,' he promised. 'Now relax before I call the nurse back to sedate you.' But my heart could not slow down.' Lily.' He stroked my face anxiously. 'I am not going anywhere. I will be here if you need me.' Do you swear you will not leave me?' I whispered. I tried to at least control the wheezing. My ribs were throbbing. He put his hands on both sides of my face and brought his face close to

mine. His eyes were wide and serious. 'I swear.' The smell of his breath was soothing.

It relieved the pain of my breathing. He continued to hold my gaze as my body slowly relaxed and the beeping returned to a normal pace. His eyes were dark, now closer to black than to gold.' Better?' he asked.' Yes,' I said cautiously. He shook his head and mumbled something incomprehensible. I thought I had picked out the word 'overreaction.' Why did you say that?' I whispered and tried not to make my voice tremble. 'Are you tired of having to save me all the time? Do you want

me to leave?' No, I do not want to be without you, Lily, of course not. Be rational. And I have no problem saving you either - if it were not for the fact that I would be the one who put you in danger... that I am the reason you are here.' Yes, you are the reason.' I frowned. 'The reason I'm here - alive.' Hardly.' His voice was just a whisper. 'Covered with gauze and plaster and barely able to move.' I was not referring to my recent near-death experience,' I said, becoming increasingly irritated. 'I thought of the others - you can make your choice. If it were not for you, I would rot in the cemetery of McAuley.'

He winced at my words, but the enchanted look did not leave his eyes.' But that is not the worst,' he whispered. He pretended I had not spoken. 'I don't see you there on the floor... crumpled and broken.' His voice was suffocating. 'I did not think I was late. Not even hearing you scream in pain, all those unbearable memories I will carry with me for the rest of eternity. No, the worst thing was the feeling... knowing that I could not stop. I think I would kill you myself.' But you did not.' I could have done it. It is that simple.' I knew I had to stay calm... But he tried to persuade himself to

leave me, and the panic fluttered in my lungs and tried to get out.'

Promise me,' I whispered. What?' You know what.' I started getting angry now. He was so stubbornly determined to deal with the negative. He heard the change in my tone. His eyes contracted. 'I don't seem strong enough to stay away from you, so I assume you'll get your way... whether it kills you or not,' he added roughly. Good.' However, he had not promised it — a fact I had not missed. The panic hardly held back; I no longer had the strength to control the anger. 'You told me how you stopped... now I want to know why,' I

demanded. Why?' he repeated suspiciously.' Why you did it. Why didn't you just let the poison spread? By now, I would be just like you.' Melvin's eyes turned flat black, and I remembered that this was something he had never intended, that I knew. Naddalin Natalie must have dealt with the things she had learned about herself... Or she had been incredibly careful with her thoughts around him - obviously, he had no idea that she had informed me about the mechanics of vampire conversions. He was surprised and angry. His nostrils flickered; his mouth looked as if he was carved out of stone. He did not

want to answer, that much was clear.' I will be the first to admit that I have no experience with relationships,' I said. 'But it just seems logical... A man and a woman must be equal... As in, one of them cannot always rush in and save the other.

They must save each other equally.' He crossed his arms on the side of my bed and put his chin on his arms. His facial expression was smooth, the anger restrained. Obviously, he had decided that he would not be angry with me. I hoped I would get a chance to warn Naddalin Natalie before he caught up with her.' You saved me,' he said softly. I cannot

always be Joyce Dunn,' I insisted. 'I also want to be Superman.' You do not know what you are asking.' His voice was soft; He stared attentively at the edge of the pillowcase.' I do.' Lily, you do not know. I have had almost ninety years to think about it, and I am still not sure.' Do you wish Melchor had not saved you?' No, I do not want that.' He paused before moving on. 'But my life was over. I did not give up anything.' You are my life. You are the only thing that would hurt me to lose.' I got better and better at it. It was easy to admit how much I needed him. However, he was very calm. Decided.'

I cannot, Lily. I am not going to do that to you.' Why not?'

My throat was clearing, and the words were not as loud as I had meant. 'Don't tell me it is too hard! After today, or it was a few days ago... Anyway, after that it should not be anything.' He stared at me.' And the pain?' he asked. I blanched. I could not help it. But I tried to stop my expression from showing how clearly, I remembered the feeling... the fire in my veins.' That is my problem,' I said. 'I can handle it.' It is possible to bring courage to the point where he becomes insane.' It is not a problem. Three days. Big deal.' Melvin grimaced

again when my words reminded him that I was more informed than he had ever intended. I watched as he suppressed anger, watched his eyes become speculative.' Charlie?' he asked succinctly. Minutes passed in silence as I tried to answer his question. I opened my mouth, but no sound came out. I closed it again. He waited, and his expression triumphed because he knew I had no true answer.'

Look, that is not a problem either,' I finally murmured; my voice was as unconvincing as ever when I lied. 'Rameauite has always made the decisions that work for her - she wants

me to do the same. And Charlie is resilient, he is used to being alone. I cannot take care of them forever. I have my own life to live.' Exactly,' he snapped. 'And I'm not going to finish it for you.' If you are waiting for me to lie on my deathbed, I have news for you! I was just there!' You will recover,' he reminded me. I took a deep breath to calm down, ignoring the pain spasm it was triggering. I stared at him, and he stared back. There was no compromise in his face.' No,' I said slowly. 'I'm not.' His forehead wrinkled. 'Of course, you are. You may have one or two scars... 'You're wrong,' I insisted.' I will die.' Really,

Lily.' He was anxious now. 'You'll be out of here in a few days. A maximum of two weeks.' I stared at him, 'I may not die now... but I will die at some point. Every minute of the day I get closer. And I am getting old.' He frowned as what I said sank, pressed his long fingers to his temples and closed his eyes. 'That's how it is supposed to happen. How it should happen. How would it have happened if I had not existed - and I should not exist.' I snorted.

He opened his eyes in surprise. 'That's stupid. It is like going to someone who just won the lottery, taking their money and saying, 'Look,

let us just go back to how things should be. It is better that way.' And I did not buy it.' I am hardly a lottery win,' he growled. That is right. You are much better.' He rolled his eyes and fixed his lips. 'Lily, we do not have this discussion anymore. I refuse to condemn you to an eternity of the night, and that is the end of it.' If you think that is the end, then you do not know me very well,' I warned him. 'You're not the only vampire I know.' His eyes turned black again. 'Naddalin Natalie wouldn't dare.' And for a moment it looked so scary that I could not help but believe it - I could not imagine anyone brave enough to cross

it.' Naddalin Natalie has seen it before, hasn't she?' I guessed. 'That's why the things she says upset you. She knows that I will be like you... at some point.' She is wrong. She also saw you dead, but that did not happen either.' You will never catch me betting against Naddalin Natalie.' We stared at each other for an exceptionally long time. It was quiet except for the whirring of the machines, the beeping, the dripping, the ticking of the big clock on the wall. Eventually, his facial expression became softer.' Where does this lead us?' I wondered. He giggled humorlessly. 'I think it's called a dead end.' I sighed. 'Ouch,' I

murmured.' How do you feel?' he asked, eyeing the button for the nurse.' I am fine,' I lied.' I do not believe you,' he said softly.' I am not going back to sleep.' You need rest. All this arguing is not good for you.' So, give in,' I indicated.' Nice try.' He reached for the button.' No!' He ignored me.' Yes?'

Screeched the loudspeaker on the wall.' We are ready for more painkillers,' he said calmly, ignoring my angry expression. I am going to send the nurse.' The voice sounded very boring.' I will not take it,' I promised. He looked at the bag of liquids hanging next to my bed. 'I

don't think they're going to ask you to swallow anything.' My heart rate started to rise. He read the fear in my eyes and sighed in frustration.' Lily, you are in pain. You need to relax so that you can heal. Why are you so difficult? They are not going to put needles in you now.' I am not afraid of needles,' I murmured. 'I'm afraid to close my eyes.' Then he smiled his crooked smile and took my face between his hands. 'I told you I am not going anywhere. Do not be afraid. If it makes you happy, I will be here.' I smiled back and ignored the pain in my cheeks. 'You talk about eternity, you know.' Oh, you are going to get

over it - it is just a swarm.' I shook my head in disbelief - it made me dizzy. 'I was shocked when I swallowed that. I know you know better.' That is the beauty of being human,' he told me.

'Things are changing.' My eyes narrowed. 'Don't hold your breath.' He laughed when the nurse came in and a syringe was swinging.' Excuse me,' she said brusquely to Edwardes got up and walked to the end of the small room, leaning against the wall. He crossed his arms and waited. I kept an eye on him, still worried. He met my gaze calmly.' Let us go, honey.' The nurse smiled as she injected the medication into my tube.

'You're going to feel better now.' Thank you,' I murmured unabashedly. It did not take long. I could feel the drowsiness trickle through my bloodstream instantly.' It should,' she murmured as my eyelids hung down. She must have left the room because something cold and smooth touched my face.' Stay.' The word was washed out.' I will,' he promised. His voice was beautiful, like a lullaby. 'As I said, as long as it makes you happy... as long as it's best for you.' I tried to shake my head, but it was too hard. 'It's not the same,' I murmured. He laughed. 'Don't worry now, Lily. You can argue with

me when you wake up.' I smiled. 'Kay.' I could feel his lips on my ear.'

I love you,' he whispered. Me too.' I know,' he laughed softly. I turned my head slightly... Search. He knew what I was all about. His lips touched mine gently.' Thank you,' I sighed.' Anytime.' I was not there anymore. But I fought weakly against the Stupor. There was only one thing I wanted to tell him.' Eduard?' I struggled to pronounce his name clearly.' Yes?' I bet on Naddalin Natalie,' I murmured. EPILOG: AN OCCASIONELY helped me into his car, being incredibly careful with the hint of silk and chiffon, the flowers he had

just put into my intricately styled curls, and my bulky walking cast. He ignored the angry sentence of my mouth. When he calmed me down, he sat down in the driver's seat and drove back on the long, narrow ride.' At what point exactly are you going to tell me what is going on?' I asked grumpily. I really hated surprises. And he knew that.' I am shocked you have not figured it out yet.' He threw a mocking smile in my direction, and my breath stuck in my throat. Would I ever get used to his perfection?' I mentioned that you look genuinely nice, don't you?' I checked it out.' Yes.' He grinned again. I had never seen him

dressed in black before, and in contrast to his pale skin, his beauty was surreal.

I could not deny that much, even though the fact that he was wearing a tuxedo made me extremely nervous. Not as nervous as the dress. Or the shoe. Only a shoe, as my other foot was still securely covered with plaster. But the stiletto heel, held only by satin ribbons, certainly would not help me when I tried to limp around.' I cannot stop when Naddalin Natalie treats me like guinea pig Barbie when I do,' I said angrily. I had spent most of the day in Naddalin Natalie's stunningly large bathroom, a helpless

victim when she played hairdresser and beautician. Whenever I fidgeted or complained, she reminded me that she had no memories of being human and asked me not to ruin her vicarious fun. Then she had dressed me in the most ridiculous dress - deep blue, ruffled and off the shoulders, with French tags I could not read - a dress that was better suited for a catwalk than McAuley. Nothing good could come of our formal attire, I was sure. Unless... but I was afraid to put my suspicions into words, even in my own head. I was then distracted by the sound of a phone ringing. Melvin pulled his cell phone out of a pocket in

his jacket and looked briefly at the caller ID before answering.' Hello, Charlie,' he said cautiously.' Charlie?'

I frowned. Charlie was... difficult since my return to McAuley. He had divided my terrible experience into two defined reactions. To Melchor, he was almost worthy of worship. On the other hand, he was stubbornly convinced that Melvin was to blame - because without him I would not have left my home in the first place. And Melvin was far from agreeing with him. Back then, I had rules that had not existed before: curfews... Visiting hours. Something Charlie said made Melvin's eyes widen in disbelief, and

then a grin spread across his face.' You are kidding!' He laughed.' What is it?' I demanded. He ignored me. 'Why don't you let me talk to him?' Melvin suggested with obvious joy. He waited a few seconds.' Hi, Tyler, this is Melvin Shezor.' His voice was very friendly on the surface. I knew it well enough to grasp the soft edge of the threat. What did Tyler do at my home? The terrible truth began to dawn on me. I looked again at the inappropriate dress Naddalin Natalie had forced me into.' I am sorry if there was a misunderstanding, but Lily is not available tonight.' Melvin's tone changed, and the threat in his voice

suddenly became much clearer as he continued. 'To be completely honest, it will not be available every night, which concerns anyone but me. Nothing bad.'

-And-

'I'm sorry for your evening.'

He did not sound sad at all. And then he snapped the phone, a huge grin on his face. My face and neck reddened with rage in crimson. I could feel the angry tears beginning to fill my eyes. He looked at me in surprise. 'Was the last part a bit too much? I did not want to offend you.' I

ignored that.' You take me to the prom!'

I screamed. It was now embarrassingly obvious. If I had been paying attention at all, I am sure I would have noticed the date on the posters that adorned the school buildings. But I never dreamed that he would think of submitting to it. Didn't he know me at all? He had not expected the force of my reaction, that was clear. He squeezed his lips and his eyes narrowed.

'Don't be difficult, Lily.' My eyes flashed to the window; We were already halfway to school.' Why are

you doing this to me?' I asked in horror. He pointed to his tuxedo. 'Honestly, Lily, what do you think we're doing?' I was ashamed. First, because I had overlooked the obvious. And because the vague suspicions — real expectations — that I had formed all day when Naddalin Natalie was trying to turn me into a beauty contest winner went so far beyond the mark.

My half-anxious hopes now seemed very stupid. I had suspected that there was an opportunity to get together. But prom! That was the worst thing that came to mind. Angry tears rolled down my cheeks. I remembered with dismay that I was

wearing mascara very atypically. I quickly wiped my eyes to avoid stains. My hand was unredacted when I pulled it away; Naddalin Natalie had known I needed waterproof makeup.' This is completely ridiculous. Why are you crying?' he asked in frustration.' Because I am mad!' Lily.'

He directed the full power of his glowing golden eyes at me.' What?' I murmured, distracted.' Humor me,' he emphasized. His eyes melted all my anger. It was impossible to fight with him when he cheated like that. I gave in with poor grace.' Good,' I pouted, unable to dazzle as effectively as I would have liked. 'I will go quietly.

But you will see. I am long overdue for more bad luck. I will break my other leg. Check out this shoe! It is a death trap!' I stretched out my good leg as proof.' Hmmm.' He stared at my leg longer than necessary. 'Remind me to thank Naddalin Natalie for that tonight.' Naddalin Natalie will be there?' That comforted me a little.' With Jae and Dejen... and Vivian,' he admitted. The feeling of comfort disappeared.

There had been no progress with Vivian, although I had a good relationship with her sometimes husband. Dejen enjoyed having me around me - he found my bizarre

human reactions hilarious... or it was just the fact he found so funny. Vivian pretended I did not exist. As I shook my head to disperse the direction my thoughts had gone, I thought of something else.' Is Charlie there?' I asked, suddenly suspicious. 'Of course.'

He grinned and then laughed. 'Apparently, Tyler wasn't.' I gritted my teeth. How Tyler could be so delusional, I could not imagine. At school, where Charlie could not interfere, Melvin and I were inseparable - apart from those rare sunny days. We were now in school; Vivian's red convertible stood out in

the parking lot. The clouds were thin today, a few strips of sun escaped far away in the Westenberg got out and walked around the car to open my door.

He stretched out his hand. I sat stubbornly in my seat, my arms crossed, and felt a secret hint of complacency. The lot was crowded with people in formal attire: witnesses. He could not forcibly remove me from the car like he could have done if we had been alone. He sighed. 'If someone wants to kill you, you're brave like a lion - and then when someone mentions dancing...' He shook his head. I swallowed.

Dancing.' Lily, I do not let anything hurt me - not even by yourself. I will not let you go once; I promise.' I thought about it and suddenly felt much better. He could see it in my face.' There, now,' he said gently, 'it won't be so bad.' He bent down and wrapped an arm around my waist. I took his other hand and let him lift me out of the car. He held his arm tightly around me and supported me as I limped towards school. In Phoenix, they held proms in hotel ballrooms. This dance was, of course, in the gym. It was the only room in the city that was big enough for a dance. When we got in, I giggled. There were

balloon arches and twisted garlands of pastel crepe paper that adorned the walls.'

It looks like a horror movie waiting to happen,' I nodded. Well,' he murmured as we slowly approached the ticket table — he was carrying most of my weight, but I still had to shuffle and wiggle my feet forward — 'there are more than enough vampires present.' I looked at the dance floor; A large gap had formed in the middle of the floor, in which two pairs whirled gracefully.

The other dancers pressed themselves to the sides of the room to

give them space - no one wanted to stand in opposition to such charisma. Dejen and Jae were intimidating and flawless in classic tuxedos. Naddalin Natalie stood out in a black satin dress with geometric necklines that exposed large triangles of her snow-white skin. And Vivian was... well, Vivian. She was amazing. Her vibrant scarlet dress was backless, tight on her calves, where it flared up into a wide ruffled train, with a neckline that dropped to her waist. I felt sorry for every girl in the room, myself included.'

Do you want me to lock the doors so you can massacre the unsuspecting city dwellers?' I

whispered conspiratorially.' And where do you fit into this scheme?' He grinned.' Oh, I am with the vampires, of course.' He smiled reluctantly. 'Everything you can get out of dancing.' Everything.' He bought our tickets and then turned me onto the dance floor. I shrugged his arm and pulled my feet.' I have the whole night,' he warned. Eventually, he dragged me to where his family whirled elegantly- albeit in a style that was completely unsuitable for today's times and music. I watched in horror.' Melvin.'

My throat was so dry that I could only handle a whisper. 'I

honestly can't dance!' I could feel the panic bubbling in my chest.' Do not worry, silly,' he whispered back. 'I can.'

He put my arms around his neck and lifted me up to slide his feet under mine. And then we also whirled.' I feel like I am five years old,' I laughed after a few minutes of effortless waltzing.' You do not look five,' he murmured and pulled me closer for a second, so my feet were briefly one foot above the ground. Naddalin Natalie caught my eye during a spin and smiled encouraged - I smiled back. I was surprised to realize that I was enjoying myself... a little

bit.' Okay, that is not half as bad,' I admitted. But Melvin stared at the doors, and his face was furious.' What is it?' I wondered loudly. I followed his gaze, disoriented by spinning, but eventually, I could see what bothered him. Chiaz Naztherth, not in a tuxedo, but in a long-sleeved white shirt and tie, his hair smoothed back to his usual ponytail, crossed the ground to us. After the initial shock of recognition, I could not help but feel sorry for Chiaz. He clearly felt uncomfortable - excruciating.

His face apologized when his eyes hit mine. Melvin growled very quietly.' Behave!' I hissed. Melvin's

voice was devastating. 'He wants to chat with you.' Chiaz then reached us; the embarrassment and apology were even clearer in his face.' Hey, Lily, I was hoping you would be here.' Chiaz sounded as if he had hoped for exactly the opposite. But his smile was as warm as ever.' Hello Chiaz.' I smiled back. 'What's going on?' Can I cut in?' he asked tentatively, looking at Melvin for the first time. I was shocked when I realized that Chiaz did not have to look up. He must have grown half a foot since the first time I saw him. Melvin's face was composed, his facial expression empty. His only answer was to carefully get on my feet and

take a step back.' Thank you,' Chiaz said kindly. Melvin just nodded and looked at me attentively before turning around to leave. Chiaz put his hands on my waist, and I reached up to put my hands on his shoulders.' Wow, Jake, how tall are you now?' He was complacent.

'Six-two.' We did not really dance - my leg made that impossible. Instead, we awkwardly swayed from side to side without moving our feet. It was just as good; The recent growth spurt had made him look gaiety and uncoordinated, he was not a better dancer than me.' So, how did you end up here tonight?' I asked without any

real curiosity. Given Melvin's reaction, I could guess.' Can you believe that my father paid me twenty dollars to get to your prom?' he admitted slightly ashamedly.' "Yes, I can,' I murmured. 'Well, I hope you are at least having fun. Have you seen something you like?' I teased myself and nodded to a group of girls lined up on the wall like pastel-colored confections.' Yes,' he sighed. 'But it is taken.' He looked down to meet my curious eye for just a second - then we both looked away embarrassed.' You look pretty ' he added shyly. Um, thank you. Why did Billy pay you to come here?'

I asked quickly, even though I knew the answer. Jakob did not seem to be grateful for the change of subject; He looked away, uncomfortable again. 'He said it was a 'safe' place to talk to you. I swear the old man loses his mind.' I joined his laughter weakly.' Anyway, he said if I told you something, he would get me the primary cylinder I needed,' he confessed with an embarrassed grin. Then tell me. I want you to finish your car.' I grinned back. At least Chiaz did not believe anything about it. It made the situation a little easier. On the wall, Melvin looked at my face, his own face expressionless. I saw a

second grader in a pink dress looking at him with shy speculation, but he seemed unaware of them. Chiaz looked away in shame. 'Don't get angry, okay?'

There is no way I will be angry with you, Chiaz,' I assured him. 'I am not even going to be mad at Billy. Just say what you need to do.' Well, this is so stupid, I am sorry, Lily - he wants you to break up with your boyfriend. He asked me to tell you 'Please.' 'He shook his head in disgust.' He is still superstitious, isn't he?' He was... somehow exaggerated when you hurt yourself in Phoenix. He did not believe...'Chiaz ran away

confidently. My eyes narrowed. 'I fell.' I know that' Jakob said quickly. He thinks Melvin had something to do with the fact that I was hurt.'

There was no question about it, and despite my promise, I was angry. Chiaz would not meet my eyes. We did not even bother to sway to the music, even though his hands were still on my waist and mine around his neck.' Look, Chiaz, I know Billy will not believe this, but just so you know' - he looked at me now and reacted to the new seriousness in my voice - 'Melvin really saved my life. If it were not for Melvin and his father, I would be dead.' I know,' he claimed,

but he sounded like my sincere words had influenced him a bit. He could at least convince Billy of so much.' Hey, I am sorry you had to come to do that, Chiaz,' I apologized. 'Definitely you get your parts, don't you?' Yes,' he murmured. He still looked awkward... angry.' Is there more?' I asked in disbelief.' Forget it,' he murmured, 'I'll get a job and save the money myself.' I stared at him until he met my gaze. 'Just spit it out, Chiaz.' It is so bad.' I do not care. Tell me,' I insisted.' Ok... But, geez, that sounds bad.' He shook his head. 'He said, to tell you, no, to warn you that - and this is his plural, not mine' - he raised a hand from my

waist and made small quotation marks in the air - 'We're going to watch.' He watched my reaction cautiously.

It sounded like something out of a mafia movie. I laughed aloud.' I am sorry you had to do that, Jake,' I nodded.' I do not mind that much.' He grinned relieved. His eyes were appreciative as they quickly raked over my dress. 'So, shall I tell him that you told him to throw the hell out?' he hopefully asked. No,' I sighed. 'Tell him that I said thank you. I know he means well.' The song ended, and I dropped my arms. His hands hesitated at my waist, and he looked at my hind leg. 'Do you want to dance again? Or

can I help you get somewhere?' Melvin answered me. 'That's fine, Chiaz. I am going to take it from here.' Chiaz winced and stared at Melvin with big eyes, who was standing right next to us.' Hey, I did not see you there,' he murmured. 'I think we'll see you, Lily.'

He took a step back and waved half-heartedly. I smiled. 'Yes, we'll see you later.' I am sorry,' he said again before turning to the door. Melvin's arms wrapped around me when the next song began. It was a little up-tempo for slow dancing, but that did not seem to worry him. I leaned my head contentedly against his chest.' Feeling better?' I teased.'

Not really,' he said succinctly.' Do not be mad at Billy,' I sighed. 'He's only worried about me for Charlie's sake. It is nothing personal.' I am not mad at Billy,' he corrected in a truncated voice.

'But his son irritates me.' I withdrew to look at him. His face was profoundly serious.' Why?' First, he made me break my promise.' I stared at him in confusion. He smiled half. 'I promised that I wouldn't let you go tonight,' he explained. Oh. Well, I forgive you.' Thank you. But there is something else.' Melvin frowned. I waited patiently.' He called you pretty,' he finally continued, his frown

deepening. 'This is an insult, the way you look right now. You are much more than beautiful.' I laughed. 'You might be a little biased.' I do not think it was. I also have excellent eyesight.' We whirled again, my feet on his, as he held me.' So, are you going to explain the reason for all this?' I wondered. He looked down on me confused and I stared meaningfully at the crepe paper. He thought for a moment, then changed direction and turned me through the crowd to the back door of the gym. I caught a glimpse of Charity-Anna and Buddy dancing and staring at me curiously. Charity-Anna waved, and I quickly

smiled back. Jeannette was also there, looking happy in the arms of little Chiaz Naztherth; She did not look up from his eyes, a head lower than hers. Dee and Rebeca, Emily, stared at us, with Joseph Shaw; I could name any face that passed me by. And then we were outside, in the cool, dim light of a fading sunset.

As soon as we were alone, he swung me into his arms and carried me across the dark terrain until he reached the bench in the shade of the Madron trees. He sat there holding me by his chest. The moon had already risen, visible through the wafer-thin clouds, and his face shone pale in

white light. His mouth was hard, his eyes worried.' The point?' I quietly requested. He ignored me and stared up at the moon.'

Wild in the Moonlight at Twilight again,' he murmured. 'Another end. No matter how perfect the day is, it must always end.' Some things do not have to end,' I murmured through my teeth, immediately tense. He sighed.' I took you to prom,' he said slowly, finally answering my question, 'because I do not want you to miss anything. I do not want my presence to take anything away from you if I can help her. I want you to be a human being. I

want your life to continue as it would have been if I had died in nineteen-eighteen as I should have.' I shuddered at his words and then shook my head angrily. 'In what strange parallel dimension would I ever have voluntarily gone to prom? If you were not a thousand times stronger than me, I would never have let you get away with it.'

He smiled briefly, but it did not touch his eyes. 'It wasn't so bad, you said that yourself.' That is because I was with you.' We remained silent for a minute; he stared at the moon, and I stared at him. I wish there

were a way to explain how much I was interested in a normal human life.'

Do you want to tell me something?' he asked, looking down at me with a slight smile.' Shouldn't I always?' Just promise me that you will tell me, 'He insisted with a grin. I knew I would regret it almost immediately. 'Good.' You seemed honestly surprised when you found out I was bringing you here,' he began. I was,' I interjected.' Exactly,' he agreed. 'But you must have had a different theory... I am curious - what did you think I dressed you up for?' Yes, immediate regret. I pursed my lips and hesitated. 'I don't want to tell you.' You promised,' he

disagreed. I know.' What is the problem?' I knew he thought it was just an embarrassment that held me back. 'I think it's going to make you angry or sad.'

His brows contracted over his eyes as he thought about it. 'I still want to know. Please?' I sighed. He waited.' Well... I assumed it was a kind of... Opportunity. But I did not think it would be some hackneyed human thing... Prom!' I scoffed.' Man?' he asked flatly. He had picked up the key word. I looked down on my dress and fidgeted with a stray piece of chiffon. He waited in silence.' Okay,' I confessed in a hurry. 'So, I was hoping

you had changed your mind... that you would change me.' A dozen emotions played over his face. Some I recognized: anger... Pain... and then he seemed to gather, and his expression was amused.' You thought it was a black-tie occasion, didn't you?'

he teased, touching the lapel of his tuxedo jacket. I ducked to hide my embarrassment. 'I do not know how these things work. At least for me, it seems more rational than prom.' He was still grinning. 'It's not funny,' I said. No, you are right, it is not,' he agreed, his smile faded. 'However, I'd rather treat it like a joke than believe you're serious.' But I am

serious.' He sighed deeply. 'I know. And you are really that willing?' The pain was back in his eyes. I bit my lip and nodded.'

So ready that this will be the end,' he almost murmured, 'that this will be the twilight of your life, even though your life has barely begun. You are ready to give up everything.' It is not the end, it is the beginning,' I said under my breath. I am not worth it,' he said sadly.

Do you remember when you told me that I do not see myself very clearly?' I asked and raised my eyebrows. 'You obviously have the

same blindness.' I know what I am.' I sighed. But his strange mood shifted to me. He pursed his lips and his eyes probed.

He examined my face for a long moment.' So, you are ready now?' he asked.' Um.' I swallowed. 'Yes?' He smiled and slowly tilted his head until his cold lips stroked against the skin just below the angle of his jaw.' Right now?' He whispered, his breath blowing coolly around my throat. I trembled involuntarily.'

Yes,' I whispered so that my voice had no chance of breaking. If he thought I was bluffing, he would be

disappointed. I had already made this decision, and I was sure. It did not matter that my body was rigid like a board, my hands clenched into fists, my breathing was irregular... He giggled darkly and leaned away. His face looked disappointed.' You cannot really believe that I would give in so easily,' he said with an acidic edge to his mocking tone. A girl can dream.'

His eyebrows raised. 'Is that what you dream of? To be a monster?' Not quite,' I said, frowning at his choice of words. Monsters, indeed. 'Most of the time I dream of being with you forever.' His facial expression changed, softened, and saddened by

the subtle pain in my voice.' Lily.' His fingers slightly traced the shape of my lips.

'I'll stay with you - isn't that enough?' I smiled under his fingertips. 'Enough for the action.' He frowned at my tenacity. No one would surrender tonight. He execrated, and the sound was a growl. I touched his face. 'Look,' I said. 'I love you more than anything else in the world combined. Isn't that enough?' Yes, it is enough,' he replied with a smile. 'Enough forever.' And he bent down to press his cold lips to my neck again.